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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0180
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1759
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2569
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 4452
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000495

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PK

SUBJECT: BALOCHISTAN - GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES RESIGNATION THEN
CHANGES MIND

REF: KARACHI 472

Classified By: Classified by Consul General Kay Anske for reasons 1.4 b
and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: A protocol official with Balochistan's provincial government and the Governor's Public Relations Officer both confirmed on August 21 that Balochistan Governor Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Magsi submitted his resignation on August 20 to Acting Pakistan President Mohammedian Soomro. Then, on August 22, media reports announced that Magsi had withdrawn his resignation at the behest of the province's Chief Minister. However, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-Chair Asif Zardari told Ambassador that he has offered the governorship to former Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikar Chaudhry. If so, that could be a decision that would please no one in a province increasing divided by ethnic and political rivalries. End summary.

¶2. (C) In an August 21 conversation with PolOff, Balochistan provincial government officials confirmed media reports indicating that Balochistan's Governor, Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Magsi, submitted his resignation to Acting Pakistan President Mohammedian Soomro (Senate Chair) on August 20. The resignation announcement came a week after Magsi, who was appointed by Musharraf in February 2008, stated that, due to his inability to improve the province's security situation, he might resign from office. To date, Soomro has yet to act on the resignation.

¶3. (C) On August 22, media reports stated that Magsi recanted and planned to continue as governor at the request of Balochistan Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raisani. Sources at the Governor's office refused to confirm the story, but told PolOff on August 25 that Magsi went to Islamabad to consult with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-Chair Asif Zardari about his role. However, Zardari told Ambassador that he planned to offer the Balochistan governorship to former Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikar Chaudhry, as an alternative to him returning to the court.

Possible Successors

¶4. (C) Quetta, the provincial capital, was rife with succession rumors, highlighting the religious and ethnic complexity that has come to characterize Balochistan's political scene. Shazada Zulfiqar, President of the Quetta Press Club, suggested to PolOff that Sanaullah Zehri, a member of the National Party (NP) and provincial Minister for Services and General Administration, may be picked to replace Magsi. According to unconfirmed newspaper reports, Zehri was

asked by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-Chair Asif Zardari to come to Islamabad to discuss assuming the governorship.

Ethnic Overtones

¶5. (C) Rahat Malik, a political observer, told PolOff that the appointment of Zehri, an ethnic Baloch, could cause a rift in the governing coalition. He said that the Pashtun wing of the PPP and members of the Jamait Ulama-e-Islam (JUI) party both covet the position. Malik confided that he believed the next governor would be JUI provincial President Mohammed Khan Shirani, a former national assembly member.

¶6. (C) Usman Kakar, provincial President of the Paktunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), told PolOff that an ethnic Pashtun should be the next governor to balance ethnic leadership in the government, since the Chief Minister is a Baloch. Baloch nationalist groups, such as the NP, have called on Magsi to remain as governor.

A Possibly Short Tenure

¶7. (SBU) Former President Pervez Musharraf appointed Magsi, who has twice served as Chief Minister, to the Balochistan governorship on February 27, 2008. He is a tribal head and well-respected by all major ethnic groups in the province. Magsi's wife, Shama Perveen Magsi, is the province's Minister of Information Technology and one of his sons serves in the provincial assembly.

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Comment

¶8. (C) It is not certain that Magsi will leave office, but if he does, finding a replacement for him appears set to become a delicate process fraught with political landmines for the province's governing coalition. If Asif Zardari is elected President, he will have the power to name a new governor. If Chaudhry, an ethnic Punjabi, is selected, the decision could inflame already tense feelings in the restive province.

Anske